

The Emptiness of “The Left”

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Personally, I don't think “the left” ultimately represents much of anything coherent, but rather constitutes a historically contingent coalition of ideological positions. Bastiat and other free market folks sat on the left of the french assembly, and while we might try to claim that as part of a consistent leftist market tradition, we should be honest that one's position in that particular revolution — much less revolution in general — is hardly indicative of very much. There are always revolutionaries who desire systems far worse than our own, and similarly there have been many broadly recognized “leftists” whose desires were utterly anathema to liberation.

It's popular these days to paint the left and right as egalitarian versus hierarchical. But not only is this an imposed read on a far messier historical and sociological reality, but it's honestly quite philosophically contentless. No one is particularly clear on what egalitarianism means, or even hierarchy, and many interpretations are not only mutually exclusive, they reveal supposedly identical claims as actually deeply antagonistic. Does egalitarianism mean everyone gets precisely the same wealth (however that's supposed to be measured)? Does it mean mere legal or social equality in the abstract realm of relations before The People or The State's legal system? Does it mean equal opportunity for economic striving or does it mean equal access to the people's grain stores? Does equality supersede all other virtues like liberty? Is it better to all be oppressed equally than to have some achieve greater freedom? I'm not being facetious. We paper over these deep issues with “well but common sense” and the wishful assumption that our comrades will come down on the minutia the same way we would, sharing our intuitions on various tradeoffs, but that's empirically not the case. We constantly differ.

People talk about “collective direct democracy” as if something being the near unanimous will of some social body constitutes an egalitarian condition. And, sure, it does under some definitions. But the moment I see some collective body trying to vote on my life I don't want to “participate” I want to chuck a bomb at it. Leftists use both the slogans “power to the people” and “abolish power” — this should be an intense red flag to everyone that completely different conceptual systems and values are at play. It's delusional in the extreme to suppose that if we sat down and talked about things we'd all end up on the same page. The assumption of pan-leftist solidarity or a shared common goal is a comforting lie.

The left isn't defined by some set of axioms in ethical philosophy that we can all agree on and then argue about derivations of strategy or implementation from. The left is a historical coalition thrown together by happenstance. As with revolution we tend to self-identify as the

This ship is sinking. And just because many of the rats are fleeing doesn't mean we shouldn't either.

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